

This profile is intended to provide CUPE members with basic information about the sector they work in from a national perspective. Find all our sector profiles and more information online at cupe.ca



CUPE represents over 38,000 energy sector workers in electricity generation, distribution and transmission in hydro-electric, nuclear, wind and fossil fuel utilities as well as small-scale production.

While CUPE actively defends and promotes the public ownership of electrical utilities, about 30 per cent of electrical generation and transmission is by private or publicly traded utilities companies. As such, CUPE locals represent workers in both the public and private sectors.

The number of workers CUPE collective agreements cover:

- 780 in Alberta
- 15,900 in Ontario
- 1,230 in Manitoba
- 19,800 in Quebec,
- and several hundred in Federal crown companies.

Our members are employed as trades and maintenance workers, customer service representatives, accountants, administration assistants, billing and records agents, communications staff, drafters, programmer analysts, technologists, power line workers, technicians, clerks, skilled trades workers, atomic energy workers and call centre workers.

The electricity sector in Canada directly employs about 81,000 and indirectly employs another 40,000 workers.

In the public sector, CUPE represents energy workers at all three levels of government. At the municipal level CUPE represents workers at local distribution companies (EPCOR in Edmonton, ENMAX in Calgary

and a dozen local distribution companies (LDCs) across Ontario, such as Toronto Hydro and Greater Sudbury Hydro). Provincially, CUPE has workers at both provincial crown utilities (including Manitoba Hydro, Hydro-Québec and Ontario Power Generation) and provincial safety and regulatory authorities.

Finally, at the federal level, CUPE represents workers in production and research as well as those at regulatory Crown corporations (Atomic Energy of Canada Limited).

In the private sector, CUPE has members in Hydro One, TransAlta, Bruce Power, Enwave, Northwind Solutions and many other smaller generation companies.

Green Energy Generation

Canada uses more electricity per person than any other country, but most of this electricity is produced using sources that do not contribute to climate change. Canada produces three per cent of the world's electricity, and Canadians make up 0.5 per cent of the world's population.

In Canada, electricity is responsible for 11 per cent of our CO₂ emissions. The Canadian government has mandated that electricity generation move from 80 per cent today to 90 per cent non-CO₂ emitting electricity generation by 2030. However, this includes a large increase in natural gas-powered generation which means emissions from methane, which cause climate change, will also increase.



GENERATION, DEMAND, AND TRADE

Canada is a large energy producer and a net exporter of green electricity. Our country generates 648 terawatt hours (TWh) of electricity and exports 62.8 TWh, mostly to publicly-owned utilities. Installed generating capacity in Canada is 143.44 gigawatts (GW).

- 56.35 per cent hydro
- 9.78 per cent nuclear
- 10 per cent wind/solar
- 23 per cent thermal (coal, natural gas and incineration)

Canada produces a huge amount of electricity, and Canadians are huge users of electricity. Electricity demand in 2016 reached 502 TWh, broken down as follows:

- 41 per cent industrial
- 1 per cent transport
- 20 per cent commercial
- 2 per cent agriculture
- 3 per cent public administration
- 33 per cent residential

Privatization

Across Canada, investment in wind and solar energy generation has been made through incentives for the private sector such as subsidies and feed-in tariffs. This private sector investment, instead of investment through public procurement, has enabled the rise of private ownership of electricity generation. Provinces have promoted private and cooperative solar, wind and tidal generation projects. This approach undermines publicly-owned and centrally managed electricity generation.

CUPE's position is that green energy jobs should be public sector jobs for an effective and fair energy future.

The energy sector in Ontario, Manitoba and Quebec is under increased threat of privatization through financialization and the selling-off of public utilities and infrastructure. However, the immediate short-term threats to energy sector workers is the further corporatization of utilities and more contracting out.

In Alberta, EPCOR has divested entirely from its power generation business, selling it to the private sector. The utility has nonetheless retained control of distribution and transmission, as well as sector technologies such as signals and metering. ENMAX, which is owned by the City of Calgary, is investing in the expansion of public solar and wind generation projects.

In Quebec, CUPE locals are campaigning to maintain public ownership of power with an emphasis on bringing new wind generation under the provincial public utility, Hydro-Québec. The loss of many jobs in the atomic energy sector, following the 2012 closure of the Gentilly-2 nuclear plant (decommissioning continues), illustrated the Quebec government's lack of adequate planning for a fair and equitable transition for displaced workers. Just Transition plans are needed to protect workers and their communities as the industry continues to transform.

A global trend in the privatization of public assets has emerged called "asset recycling" that seeks to monetize and marketize public assets for private gain. Asset recycling can take the form of sale and lease-back agreements, concession arrangements, franchises or the private management of public infrastructure. An example of this is Ontario's privatization of its transmission company Hydro One. Money from



the sale was directed to an asset trust to fund infrastructure projects. This model will likely be replicated in other areas across the country.

This new threat to public energy comes in addition to privatization's continuing creep in the energy sector. Techniques to extend the reach of privatization include incentives for the private ownership of decentralized renewable generation, the private development of new direct-current transmission lines for export, and the selling-off of local distribution companies.

In the UK and much of Europe, the renationalization of privatized utilities, including electricity utilities, has gained the support of the majority of the public. Calls for renationalization of electrical and other utilities are also growing in Australia and countries in Africa, along with calls for increased regulation and a transition to green energy generation.

In Germany, Spain and France, a process of "remunicipalization" is underway that involves bringing privatized utilities back under public ownership through city-wide cooperatives owned by local governments. Australian unions have also fought – and won – high profile campaigns against privatization of their generation capacity.

Internationally, the privatization of public utilities continues even as people become wary of the failures and broken promises of privatized monopoly utilities. These include increase in costs that privatization has brought in the UK, Germany, Australia, USA, India and Nigeria.

Bargaining

While the federal government regulates the environmental impacts of electricity generation – such as watersheds for hydro-electric production, atomic energy and inter-provincial transmission – all other aspects of the energy sector are provincial responsibilities. Electrical generation, distribution and transmission fall under provincial jurisdiction, organized into sub-provincial corporations in Ontario and Alberta. Structures for bargaining mirror these arrangements.

Ontario, for example, has many bargaining units across the electricity market. Hydro One agreements are regularly used as a base for comparison by provincial and other employers at local distribution companies. Of concern in Ontario is the continued increase of temporary and contract workers at Hydro One and Ontario Power Generation. This is a deliberate targeting of workers' wages and benefits to contain costs.

Our one local in Manitoba engages in informal communication with Unifor and IBEW locals to facilitate bargaining. CUPE engages in centralized bargaining in Quebec through a voluntary union coalition. In Alberta, CUPE has one utility local and one municipal local covering members in the municipal utility.

Convincing governments to take a medium to long-term view of retention and recruitment of electricity workers has been a struggle and will likely remain an issue for some time. CUPE members in the electricity sector expect to be subject to continued pressure to give up their defined benefit pension plans and switch to target benefit or defined contribution plans. Contracting out and the increase of temporary hires remain issues at bargaining tables across the sector.



Campaigns

Major local union campaigns include health and safety, campaigns for public ownership; a plan for funding a fair and sustainable transition to a low carbon economy through calls for a Just Transition; and pushing governments to plan for succession in the industry through training and recruitment.

CUPE works with allies to keep energy public all over the world. Our international electricity campaigns support public ownership of the energy sector, push for action to address climate change and expand international coordination of energy sector policy.

CUPE works directly with energy unions in other countries, including the Electrical Trades Union of Australia, Mexican utility workers and the CGT in France to support and learn from their campaigns. CUPE also works through the sector committee of Public Services International and other global union organizations like IndustriALL, Right to Energy – SOS Future, and Trade Unions for Energy Democracy.

VISIT CUPE.CA: RESOURCES FOR MEMBERS

- More information for your sector
- Tools to help you and your local
- Success stories from across the country
- And more!